



# Leslie Kavanagh

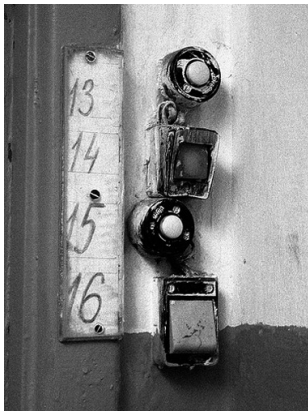
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*of Amsterdam Press, 2007), *Crossovers* (with A.Graafland), *Meditations on Space* (2010), *Aggregates* (2010), and *Chronotopologies: Hybrid Spatialities and Multiple Temporalities* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, forthcoming). Presently she is the founder and director of *studiokav.com* in Amsterdam, a multi-disciplinary and collaborative atelier. In addition, Kavanagh is an affiliated Senior Scholar at the Philosophy Institute, Leiden University, the Netherlands.*

# TOWARD A NEO-MARXIST THEORY OF SPATIO-TEMPORALITY

This essay, this attempt at “thinking through”, is inspired by and initiated by a group of my students who were asked to participate in the Rotterdam Architecture Biennale of 2009. The topic of this Biennale is the “Open City” and one sub-group studying the Russian micro-rayon, is curated by Bart Goldhoorn and Alexander Sverdlov, with the title of the “Collective”. So, initially, we must ask, what is the “collective”, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the USSR, the neo-liberalization of the capitalist economy, and the almost complete reversal of post-War socialist-welfare states in Europe. In Holland, specifically for example, social housing has been privatized, although the one last bastion of socialist provisions of rent control have been tried but as of now failed to be destroyed. The so-called “Woningwet” of 1902, the Housing Law of 1902 in Holland enabled with the support of the government, the institution of housing corporations growing out of various trade organizations (one could not yet call them trade unions), to provide social services for their common community. For example, the diamond cutters organization collected donations from their members to set up a hospital for the treatment of workers who suffered directly from the nature of their labor of “slijperslong”, a kind of brown lung syndrome specifically caused by polishing diamonds. This project is now famous in international architectural circles as the Duiker Sanatorium in Hilversum. At present, the building has been completely renovated to its original state, including furniture and paint colors, by governmental funds for renovation of cultural monuments, and is used as an obesity clinic, and as an operation theater for plastic surgery. Signs of the times. In Holland, at present, the “collective” has been appropriated by the speculative real estate market.



Similarly, yet for completely different reasons, in the vast housing estates of Russia the privatization of mass social housing projects has led to a bizarre deconstruction of notions of the collective. Originally planned as self-sustaining communities where the state was responsible for planning, production of components, “template” designs of individual apartments, and maintenance; at present inhabitants are given “vouchers” in order to purchase an apartment. You may, indeed, “own” your own apartment, but have no control over the wider social process of decision making. Your apartment can be torn down, for example, without proper hearings or social procedures. Furthermore, the extent of one’s intervention is in the investment in renovating the interior of one’s own apartment, often with heavy steel doors and locks in order to prevent thieves from robbing you of your “capital accumulation”. There is, however, a border at the front door. There exists no mechanism for “collective” decision making as to the expenditure of maintenance costs, or even common concerns within the apartments on a stairwell, or an area of development and its urban landscaping and connections to the Metro, for example.

Consequently, somewhere between these two extremes of the dissolution of the “collective” within global Empire, in one way we are still careening, as Marx would say, between one financial crisis to another. However, we stand at the historical moment in world history, unprecedented, where more people live in urban environments, than in rural environments. We as a species are now truly a “civic society”, a collective that attempts to define what it means to be a social being. Questions of the “collective” in a global interdependent economy are more urgent than ever. Yet, what can we say about the “collective”, when every notion of the collective, both in the Democratic Socialist countries of Western Europe, and the communist project in Russian and Eastern-bloc countries has been completely dismantled, or emptied out?

How, too, then is architecture to intercede in a geo-political situation marked by “Empire”, or neo-colonialism, or most recently, the moral and fiscal failure of neo-liberal capitalism?

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In order to sketch out the problematic, I turn to the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* published in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Following on the heels of the fall of the Berlin wall, and the re-establishment of autonomous nation-states in Eastern Europe, this work firstly defines “Empire”, as a contemporary condition as opposed to “Imperialism”, and most importantly, as a way forward out of the, until recently, hegemonic triumph of neo-liberal hyper-Capitalism. Negri and Hardt define Empire as neither a Hobbesian nor a Lockean variant of the sovereignty of a nation-state; rather, a paradigm shift that forces together necessarily the economical and political powers of a supra-national order. A global order or interdependence has emerged from the relative autonomy of sovereign nation-states. Truly, as Marx predicted, the economical order rules over the political or social. The economic becomes not only the relation between persons, between laborers, but also between nations. Capital, for Marx, is not a ‘thing’, but a relation. Consequently, a new logic and structure of rule, of right, of political economy has coalesced. This new form, Empire, in Negri and Hardt’s terminology, is composed of a series of national and supra-national organizations united under the single logic of neo-liberal capitalism.

To briefly summarize, Empire in contradistinction to Imperialism is characterized by the following: Empire establishes not one center of power, including the US, but a multiplicity of centers in a global network; Empire does not respect fixed boundaries, but rather thrives upon the breaking through of boundaries to the rule of capital; Empire necessarily incorporates and parasites off of the entire globe. Accordingly, Empire modulates networks of command by managing hybrid identities, mounting flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges. Empire, nevertheless, is still a transition within the capitalist mode of production, but one that is moving from the industrial to the communicative means of surplus value. Empire still relies upon, unfortunately, the exploitation of the worker in order to create surplus value. Following Foucault, Negri and Hardt describe the “creation of ter-

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1 Hardt, Michael and Negri: Antonio: *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000).

ritory” involved in the hegemony of capitalist political economy as a “bio-political production”, a production of social life itself. Consequently, Empire opens out into all aspects of civil society, seeking to directly rule over human behavior, and creating the very world it inhabits. Going beyond the description that Marx gave to productive labor, where a worker must be paid only a “living wage” which is determined by not only his survival subsistence, but also his “reproductive labor”, ensuring the next generation of workers to be exploited. Empire, in extension, commodifies human reproduction itself.

Truly, the task of Empire is to reorganize and to redirect the process of capital flows. Most importantly for Negri and Hardt, any resistance to capitalism is never from without, since an outside is impossible; rather, a transformation from within Empire. Globalization is not unified, but rather all-encompassing, a totalitarianism of sorts. Consequently, any resistance must also not depend upon the organization of the class struggle across cultural, racial, or gender lines. Resistance can be mounted in small-scale initiatives, ultimately, and incrementally undermining the power of Empire to coalesce, to coerce, to suppress.

Yet, this strategy is not a return to a barter economy as David Harvey suggests, or an Arcadian “outside”, mendaciously protected from the evils and the reaches of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> As Negri and Hardt point out: “the creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire are also capable of autonomously constructing a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges.”<sup>3</sup> These creative forces do not merely attack from the margins, or resist from without the machines of power, but rather create new legitimization of power that are hybrid, yet immanent and inclusive. The very development of capital into every corner of the earth in fact also makes its eco-political structure venerable to individual resistances because entry into the system through revolt automatically spreads throughout Empire. In addition, these forces for resistance

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2 Harvey, David: *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) especially pp. 257ff. See also Callinicos, Alex: *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx* (London and Sydney: Bookmarks Publishers, 1996). “Marx always conceived of the working class as the class whose own self-emancipation would also be the liberation of the rest of humanity. The socialist revolution to whose cause he devoted his life can only be, at one and the same time, the emancipation of the working class and the liberation of all the oppressed and exploited sections of society. Those who accept the truth of Marx’s views cannot rest content with a mere intellectual commitment... We cannot simply observe the world but must throw ourselves, as Marx did, into the practical task of building a revolutionary party amid the life and struggles of the working class. ‘The philosophers have interpreted the world,’ wrote Marx, ‘the point, however, is to change it.’ If Marxism is correct, then we must act on it.” p. 196–7.

3 See note 1, p. xv.u. See also p. 371ff.

are not defined narrowly by “class”, whether of labor, or neo-colonial, or gender. The desire for liberation is truly universal. In a way, this “within” is also a continuation of the project of Enlightenment, the encouragement of individuals to take responsibility for reason, for self development, for knowledge away from the institutions of government and the church. Today, Empire can be seen as a civic construction project, with individuals who are capable of taking responsibility not only for themselves, but the production of places of resistance, of communities that perhaps differ but support the self-determination of the whole each in its own singular way. As Negri and Hardt explicate:

*... our reasoning here is based on two methodological approaches that are intended to be non-dialectical and absolutely immanent: the first is critical and deconstructive, aiming to subvert the hegemonic languages and social structures and thereby reveal an alternative ontological basis that resides in the creative and productive practices of the multitude; the second is constructive and ethico-political, seeking to lead the processes of the production of subjectivity toward the constitution of an effective social, political alternative, a new constituent power.<sup>4</sup>*

“Collective action”, then becomes something more widely defined than the strikes of a particular class or guild of laborers, however united. Collective action is the power of the masses, truly, in a political economy somewhere in the interrupted notions of the development of socialism through the phase of a social democracy, and a more extreme democracy that is not merely reduced to “capitalism”, but well and truly representative of the “collective”, of the masses in all their hybridity and heterogeneity. Therefore, the class struggle becomes “classless” and more “democratic”; the revolt becomes a way of wielding the power of the multitude, the ethico-political; and the resistance becomes immanent and inclusive.

“Workers of the world unite!” Here “workers” are not just the proletarian, not just a class of skilled or semi-skilled laborers. In Marx’s terms, the worker is he who has nothing to sell but his own labor power. In this way, all workers are coerced into complicity with their own repression, subjugation, and exploitation. Yet in the construction of the ethico-political that is Empire, the singular forces create an immanent collective. We wish also to escape the classifications that separated us: theory vs. praxis, intellectual vs. laborer, knowledge vs. action. The “place” of power is indeed “u-topic”, for the position or situation of resistance disappears into the immanent field of power relations just as quickly as it arises—truly guerilla tactics.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

Most of the theorizing about territories, boundaries, and the status of the Nation State in Europe after the war was highly influenced by Marxist philosophers, historians, and urban theorists. Yet with the effective collapse of communism, how do we think our way forward out of the impasse?

The Structure of Empire can be seen as a spatio-temporal conception beyond borders, and as a consequence, new structures can be explored. In *Empire* by Negri/Hardt, a new sort of socio-political structure arises. For them, the old framework of social and political relations no longer applies. However, this new network neither arose spontaneously, nor transcended the old by singular powers. Rather a paradigm shift has taken place, constructing Empire. A hyper-capitalistic conception of global order arises bringing together various strands of power, both economic, social, and political. Nevertheless, just because this system lays itself out horizontally rather than vertically does not mean that the capacity to domination and repression is any less potential. Global Empire employs strategies of intervention that do not necessarily include waging war in a traditional sense. Indeed, war is no longer localized, rather also a layer of immanence that slips through any kind of determination of sanction and repression. For the most part, strategies of Empire rely on techniques of command over global space. As Negri and Hardt state:

*Empire is emerging today as the center that supports the globalization of productive networks and casts its widely inclusive net to try to envelop all power relations within its world order [...] Empire is born and shows itself as crisis.*<sup>5</sup>

But, is Empire really new? In *Grundrisse*, “The Rise and Fall of Capitalism”, Karl Marx had already diagnosed the evolution of capitalism: “There is nothing which can escape, by its own elevated nature or self-justifying characteristics, from this cycle of social production and exchange... But because capital sets up any such boundary as a limitation, and is thus ideally over and beyond it.”<sup>6</sup> Negri and Hardt propose the thesis that “Empire” is an emerging form of sovereignty, a new logical order and structure of power. Yet within this network of power is also the means to continue oppression of all kinds, perhaps other advantages emerge. The network of political power incorporates and subsumes. Globalization is not fixed or unified or univocal; rather it is ubiquitous. In this way, Negri and Hardt can be said to be—not the fruition of global hyper-capitalism—but the denouement of Marxist capitalist production.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Marx, Karl: “The Communist Manifesto.” In: *Sämtliche Werke*, p. 398.

The chief problem, however, with the argument posed by Negri and Hardt in *Empire*, is the same one that has historically plagued any revolutionary movement. The revolutionary inevitably becomes the tyrant. Even though they acknowledge that, “even the dominant countries are now dependent on the global system; the interactions of the world market have resulted in a generalized disarticulation of all economies.”<sup>7</sup> Yet instead of embracing this ubiquitous character of the world market, for there is truly no escape, Negri and Hardt argue for yet another over-arching transcendental rule of law, a “global constitution”. Even though I agree that a mere shift between isolationist hierarchical authoritarian structures of organized capital is not eradicated by a horizontal network structure for capital can flow where its exploitation allows the most surplus value.

Negri and Hardt’s version of capitalist sovereignty is a scenario where *capital therefore demands not a transcendent power but a mechanism of control that resides on the plane of immanence. Through the social development of capital, the mechanisms of modern sovereignty—the processes of coding, overcoding, and recoding that imposed a transcendent order over a bounded and segmented social terrain—are progressively replaced by an axiomatic: that is, a set of equations and relationships that determines and combines variables and coefficients immediately and equally across various terrains without reference to prior and fixed definitions or terms.*<sup>8</sup>

Yet they admit that “only the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real.”<sup>9</sup>

In summary, any new theory of spatio-temporality in the beginning of the twenty-first century must take into account the following: We stand at the historical turning point in that a majority of world citizens are now living in urban environments, so we need to ask again: “what does ‘the collective’ mean?”

The nature of work, and therefore the nature of the proletariat revolution, is radically different than in Marx’s time. “Worker” can also mean knowledge worker. The “worker” is also ethnico-linguistically diverse, and this diversity needs to be actualized rather than being used to thwart revolutionary struggle. Therefore, any revolution must not just be a proletarian revolution, but a revolution in the very social relations of human beings living in communities. Workers, whether

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7 See note 1, p. 284.

8 Ibid., p. 326–7.

9 Ibid., p. 411.



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bankers or non-skilled laborers, must become a force for change, and not just a producer of the very conditions of their collective exploitation. Workers “have no country”.<sup>10</sup>

We wish to eradicate binary oppositions of intellectual vs. laborer, theory vs. praxis, knowledge vs. action. These oppositions, as well as other ontological categories such as authoritarian transcendental power structures, are no longer acceptable or even tenable. We must “let things be” and consider processes in all their complexity and heterogeneity.

With the acknowledgement that both communist regimes and neo-liberal capitalism have their mechanisms for repression, exploitation, and obstruction, a middle-way, a more representative, and immanent democratic “socialism” of the masses is preferable. This position would be at once more “democratic” than the capitalist mechanisms that are often conflated to its equivalent, and more “social” than the fully developed stage of communism theorized by Marx/Lenin as a class-less society.

The Marxist/Leninist notion of “uneven development” needs to be thought through precisely from a global perspective of dynamic capital flows. No corner of the earth today escapes, and capitalism in fact exploits this very unevenness. “Capital is an organism that cannot sustain itself without constantly looking beyond its boundaries, feeding off its external environment. Its outside is essential.”<sup>11</sup> Capital is a voracious beast, necessarily consuming all in its wake, until no corner of the globe goes “undeveloped”.

Architecture, in my opinion, needs a change of scale. This would mean a return to an ethico-social engagement for our profession, as well as the “sweep your own stoop” approach of the small scale, (even urban guerilla tactics) in order to intercede in our local communities; that is to say, micro-movements for resistance, transforming the world in between the cracks.

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<sup>10</sup> See note 6, p. 260.

<sup>11</sup> See note 1, p. 224.

And lastly, we architects need to dare to care again, and not get non-productively encumbered with fruitless pseudo-theoretical debates. In this regard, I will happily be accused of being “utopian”.

To end with, I quote the best description of what architects do, and what architecture can be, from David Harvey’s *Spaces of Hope*,<sup>12</sup> what he calls the “insurgent architect”.

*Through changing our world, we change ourselves [...] Decisions carry their own determinations, their own closures, their own authoritarian freight. Praxis is about confronting the dialectic in its ‘either/or’ rather than its transcendent ‘both/and’ form [...] In reflecting on what we insurgent architects do, a space must be left for the private and the personal—a space in which doubt, anger, anxiety, and despair as well as certitude, altruism, hope and elation may flourish [...] No one can hope to change the world without changing themselves.*<sup>13</sup>

Or, as Negri and Hardt argue: “What we need is to create a new social body...Our lines of flight, our exodus must be constituent and create a real alternative... we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all, a new community.”<sup>14</sup> Is this not *the true constructive project* of the architect? Is this not a *utopia* worthy of its name?

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12 Harvey, David: *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

13 Ibid., p. 234–5.

14 See note 1, p. 204. See also Karatani, Kojin: *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003). Karatani especially in the final chapter entitled: “Toward Transcritical Counteractions: A Possible Communism”, explicates an initiative of what is called, “associationism” in Japan, the NAM, the New Associationist Movement founded in 2000. “... a countermovement against the capitalist nation-state”, Karatani proposes, “would gradually construct the “association” as the principle of exchange as an alternative to those of the capitalist nation-state, and be an association of those associations.” (p. 303). “The starting point of the counteraction”, he goes on to say, “is each individual. But this is not an abstract individual, but an individual who is placed in the nexus of social relations. Every individual lives in multidimensions.” (p. 306). Thus, Karatani expands upon the profound insight of Marx that capital is a social relation, in the suggestion that a counteraction or resistance might take two forms: creating new associations or notions of the collective, and “voting with the euro”, or resistance to participating in any consumption that is exploitative.